

# An In-Depth Case Study of a Large Health Systems' Employer Practices to Promote Employment Outcomes

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# Why this business?

- \$3.3 billion not for profit health system
  - 19 acute care hospitals
  - 1 psychiatric hospital
  - 5 nursing care facilities
  - 4 assisted living facilities
  - 14 home care and hospice care services
  - More than 22,000 employees

# Why this business?

1. Health care is one of the fastest growing areas of employment
1. Hospitals are small cities representing multiple types of businesses
2. This business named one of the Top 10 health care providers in Diversity, Inc. magazine
3. VCU has existing relationship allowing us access to all levels of management and staff

# History

- Partners for 9+ years on a federally funded RCT (NIDILRR)
- Project studied the efficacy of Project SEARCH
  - Internship program facilitating employment
  - Transition aged youth with autism
- 9 VCU staff embedded in 4 hospitals
  - 75 departments
  - 127 interns with autism
  - 39% of interns hired by the health care facility

# Background of Employment Practices Project

- Questions arose concerning what made the program successful?
  - The Business Leadership/Administration?
  - Managers/Coworkers?
  - VCU staff?
  - Interns?
  - Everyone combined?
- Partnership for Employer Practices grant arose from these continued internal questions

# Phased Approach to Research

- Phase 1:
  - Focus Groups
  - Interviews and Observations
  - Survey
- Phase 2:
  - Curriculum Development
  - Pilot at lower performing hospitals
- Phase 3:
  - Dissemination of all results

# Phase 1

## Focus Groups, Interviews, & Observations

- 27 Executives
  - At least 2 from each hospital
- 3 HR Directors (one declined to participate)
- 2 HR Staff
- 2 Talent Acquisition Team Members
- 2 Wellness Team Staff
- 14 Department Managers
  - 4 each at 3 hospitals and 2 from smallest hospital
- 28 Department Staff
  - 2 from each department
- 10 Employment Specialists

# Focus Groups

- Five primary themes:
  1. Organizational mission guides decision making concerning the employment of PWDs;
  2. Living the mission leads to employing PWDs;
  3. Organizational values were important to employing PWDs;
  4. The organization benefited from employing PWDs;
  5. Leaders mentioned that employing PWDs benefited organizational staff and the surrounding community.

# Theme 1: Organizational mission guides decision making concerning the employment of PWDs

- “Our mission and vision creates a culture,”
- “It is an overlay to how we think . . . [I]t provides our lens through which we see the world. Our perspective”
- “Mission and vision creates a culture here when we’re asked if we can employ someone with a disability, our answer is, let’s find a way. It’s just our culture”
- “Our mission is to provide good help to those in need, including the poor, the marginalized and the underserved. And so, many times, people with disabilities are marginalized”

## Theme 2: Living the mission leads to employing PWDs

- “We reinforce our mission with our employees every single day. And, we talk about it, who we are, where we are, what we’re here for every single day, and I think that is why we’re successful because we keep that at the forefront of everything we do.”
- “From a leadership standpoint, because I think people cue off their leader. I think we say it, it’s more important what we don’t say. We expect you to be patient, to be forgiving, to be reflective. To be understanding. And if you don’t, you probably are in the wrong culture.”
- “a variety of jobs and tasks . . . when something doesn’t match, we find the will to better match. Not to give up”

# Theme 3: Organizational values were important to employing PWDs

- “That question created a silo or barrier that I don’t think about on my day to day actions here. They’re individuals, people I work with. And I don’t see them for their disabilities. I see them for who they are.”
- “I’m often in the hallway when visitors will approach one of our employees with autism to ask for directions. And that doesn’t go very well. Typically, I’ll intervene and provide the directions but then I’ll also explain to the visitor, we employ people with autism . . . I always get positive feedback . . . That happens a lot, in fact.”

# Theme 4: The organization benefited from employing PWDs

- “This is work that these particular folks [PWDs] actually enjoy, they’re good at and better at than some of the folks who may not otherwise be differently abled in terms of how they work”
- “I first came here when I walked and kind of toured the facility, I saw the folks who were here. For me I had more respect for the facility because of the fact that they do live up to their mission. There is equity here. There is fairness here. So, I think a sense of respect.”
- “Employees report they feel better about being here when we employ people with disabilities” and that employees with disabilities “raise the engagement level of the entire group”

# Theme 5: Benefits to Organization Staff and Surrounding Community

- “[Employing PWDs] made us more aware of the skills that they do have. You know, I think so often people look at somebody with a disability and dismiss them, but we’ve been able to actually integrate them . . .”
- “We’re providing the family a chance to live a more normal life . . . [T]hey [family of PWDs] are able to . . . go to their work during the day. They know that their children are meaningfully employed. And so, it’s really bringing overall health and wholeness to everybody in that equation, including us as the employer, their family and the individual.”

# Trickle Down Effect

Is there a trickle down effect ....?

- Mission
- Values
- Which Values

# Interviews and Observations

- “The Bon Secours Effect”
  - A Dynamic Leader
  - Alignment of Values Across the Organizational Structure
  - Organizational Climate
  - Allocation of Resources
  - Recruiting and Hiring Practices
    - Person First Philosophy
    - Flexibility and Customized Positions
    - Providing Appropriate Support for PWD’s
    - Cultivating a Developmental (and Generous) Perspective

# Benefits, Challenges, and Opportunities for Growth

- PWDs as Resources
- Balancing Commitment to Hire PWDs with Health Care System Metrics
- Overcoming Deficit Perspectives and the Charitable Impulse
  - Charity vs. Human Resource-Oriented
- Understanding and Supporting Intersectionality in the Workplace

# For More Information:

- McDonough J, Ham W, Brooke A, Wehman, P., Wright, T., Godwin, J., Junod, P., & Hurst, R. (May 2020). Health Care Executive Perceptions of Hiring and Retention Practices of People With Disabilities: Results From Executive Focus Groups. *Rehabilitation Counseling Bulletin*. doi:[10.1177/0034355220915766](https://doi.org/10.1177/0034355220915766)
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- Wright, T., Wehman, P., McDonough, J., Thomas, K., Ochrach, C., Brooke, A., Ham, W., Godwin, J.C., & Junod, P. (2020). Charity-oriented versus human resource-oriented perspectives: Investigating staff understandings of employment practices for persons with disabilities. *Journal of Applied Rehabilitation Counseling*, 51, 146-167.
- Wehman, P., Sima, A., Iwanaga, K., McDonough, J., Brooke, A., Godwin, J., Junod, P., Ham, W. & Brooke, V. (Under Review). Organizational Factors Influencing Coworkers' Attitudes toward Employees with Disabilities: A Hierarchical Regression Analysis. Manuscript submitted to *Rehabilitation Research Policy and Education*.
- Wehman, P., Iwanaga, K., Sima, A., McDonough, J., Chan, F., Brooke, A., Ham, W., Godwin, J. & Junod, P. (In Press) Assessing attitudes of hospital staff toward working with co-workers with disabilities: A preliminary study. *Journal of Rehabilitation*.

# Thank You!

- Do you have any questions?  
<https://ep.vcurrctc.org/index.cfm>
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